

# Milestone



2015



# MILESTONE

Volume 11 2015

## Art & Literature Review

Creative Expressions of Western North Carolina Artists & Writers



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Mission Statement

Milestone is the biennial art and literature review published by Southwestern Community College. The purpose of this publication is to showcase the creative expressions of Western North Carolina artists and writers.

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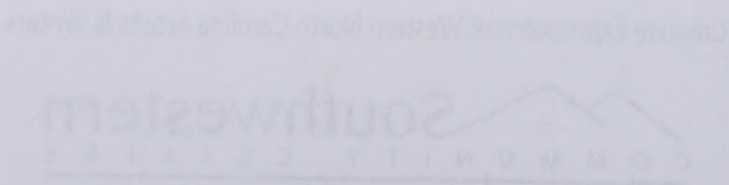
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## Dedication

This edition of the *Milestone* is dedicated to all Southwestern Community College students, faculty, staff and communities in honor of SCC's 50th Anniversary.

# Milestone

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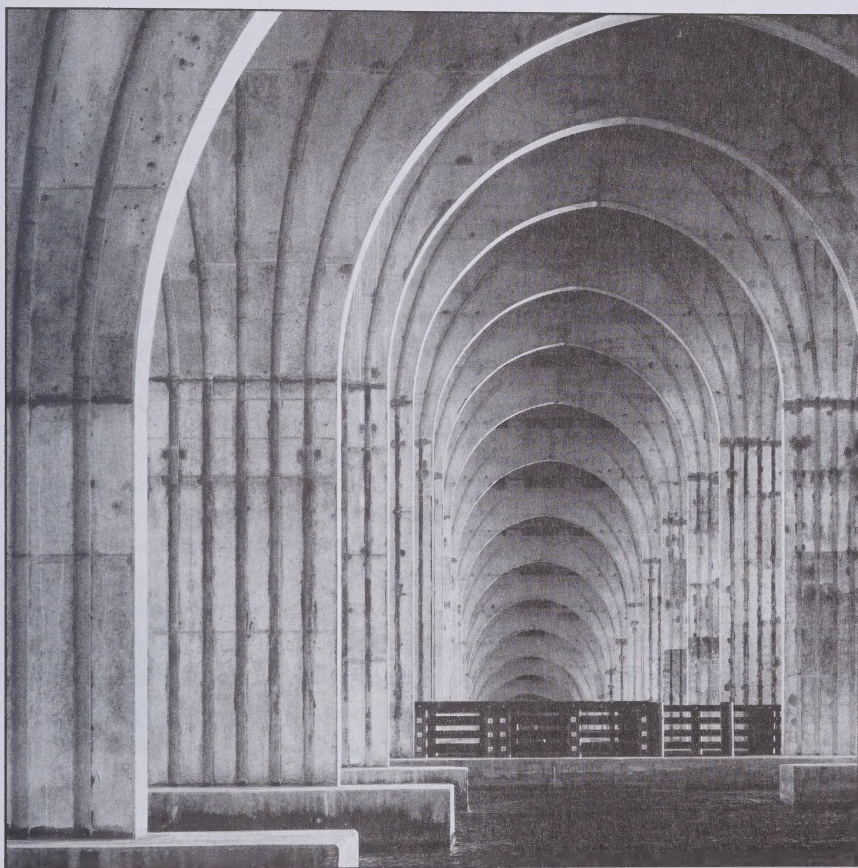
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JOHN FINNERTY  
FIRST PLACE ~ ART

## Duct-Tape and Tequila

RACHEL HARBAUGH  
FIRST PLACE ~ POETRY

In 1928

A little girl with porcelain eyes  
Was born to a man with warped hands  
And a woman far too young to look so old.  
And her mama wanted to name her Hope  
Because she knew she'd break the cycle  
But her daddy said her name was Rose  
And so it was.

In 1932

A little boy with bright blue eyes  
Was born to a man named Jack with Jack on his breath  
And a woman who didn't know when to keep her mouth shut  
And his brother wanted to name him Peter  
Because he'd read it in a book  
But his father said his name was Matthew  
And so it was.

In the years that followed

The little girl's eyes began to show hairline cracks  
And the little boy began to turn into his father  
But Rose learned how to fix things  
And Matthew learned to cover things.  
And so it was.

In 1957

The little girl with porcelain eyes  
Married the little boy with bright blue eyes  
And Rose wanted to have a baby  
Because she had learned how to fix people  
But babies never need fixing if you raise them right.  
But Matthew said there would be time for babies later.  
And so it was.

In 1963

The little girl with porcelain eyes  
Gave birth to a little girl with green marble eyes  
And Rose wanted to name her Grace  
Because she was determined to save her.  
But Matthew said her name would be Jessica.  
And so it was.

In 1970

The little girl with marble eyes  
Knocked over a vase  
That had belonged to her daddy's mother.  
And she tried to sweep it up with her hands  
Because Daddy would be mad.  
But she cut her thumb  
And her momma cleaned it and kissed it.  
And told her everything would be alright a lot  
But then her daddy came home  
And he smelled funny  
And she couldn't understand why he was angry  
But he left a hole in the wall  
And so it was.

In the years that followed

The girl with marble eyes  
Was taught by her momma how to be a fixer  
And she learned from her daddy how to be a drinker  
And she wanted to stop  
And she wanted to believe everything was gonna be alright a lot.  
But she knew that was a lie.  
So she learned to smile through her cracked marble eyes  
And wear a mask with the best of them.  
And so it was.

## Cat Eyes

RACHEL HARBAUGH  
FIRST PLACE ~ SHORT STORY

A full harvest moon shone through the open window and cast shadows onto the floorboards. The yellowed, lace curtain diluted the low hum of tree frogs and hazy vibrations of cicadas but they still could be heard; off in the distance, a dog howled. Or maybe a coyote. They had been getting bad this year. One had gotten into that Arless boy's chicken coop. Feathers and blood and eggshells were all the beast had left. They were getting too used to humans, too used to gunshots and smoke. It was time to cull them down. Old man Logan had organized a hunt for after the pancake breakfast on Saturday.

The old grandfather clock hanging next to the flagstone fireplace chimed out once and then resumed its turning of gears and ticking. The house heard a dull thud and then a crash as a grey and white cat hopped onto a bookshelf to clean itself, knocking over a vase in the process. Soon, a light switched on upstairs and heavy footsteps began making their way down the steps. Even at seventy-eight, Bass Corbett was a big man. Not big in the way Mrs. Cain down at the post office is. He's got a beer belly, sure enough. Always did like his alcohol. But Bass was big in the way he carried himself. He didn't just walk; he'd stride. His shoulders were wide, and though they were slumped now, back in his twenties he could carry 200-plus pounds on his back. His back carried a lot: lumber and metal pilings and nails and rope. It hadn't carried any of that in fifteen plus years, though. Not since the mill had closed down.

Bass turned on the kitchen light and stared down at the pottery shards laying on the red area rug. He reached into the crevice between the fridge and the off-white wall and picked the straw broom off of the hook. Then he bent down, his knees creaking, and grasped the handle of the dustpan. After he straightened his back, he walked back into the living room.

The cat stayed on the bookcase, her paw poised at her mouth. She stopped cleaning herself when she saw Bass. He never liked cats, didn't like the way their eyes always seemed to see right through him. And this cat was the worst, always peering at him while he slept, all silent and watching. Reminded him of the Baptist preacher in town; Bass always felt like he had to confess some sin he never did whenever something looked at him the way that grey cat or that balding preacher did. He really ought to get rid of that cat, but she was Loula-Anne's. He couldn't do that to her. She'd whoop him if he got rid of her while she was gone. Bass remembered when she got the cat. He'd been over in the neighboring town all day; putting in tobacco. The doctor had told him he needed to take it easier. That his knees and back had been put through hell for forty years and wasn't it about time that he just sit back and relax and let the youngins take over? The doctor didn't understand that he couldn't sit back and do nothing. It wasn't in his blood or his mind to do nothing. His daddy always said he had trigger fingers, that his hands were always itching to be doing something. But the doctor didn't have itchy fingers; he had baby-smooth fingers with nails that looked more like Loula-Anne's after she put lacquer on



them, than his own broken, dirty ones. And his handshake was weak. Bass couldn't listen to a man with woman hands and a flimsy grip, so he kept finding odd farm jobs.

After he'd helped put in the last of the tobacco for the day, he drove the fifteen miles back home, noticing when he turned onto the dirt road leading to their house that there was more white dust flying than normal. Hadn't got enough rain that summer.

When he threw his old Chevy into park in the high grass, he saw Loula-Anne sitting on the peeling steps, wearing one of her old, flour-sack dresses, with a bundle of something grey curled in her lap.

"What'd ya got there, darlin'?" he asked, as he slammed the rusty truck door.

She looked up at him and smiled, blue eyes sparkling as deep-set laugh lines beckoned to him.

"Remember how after Prince died, you said we won't ever get another dog?"

Bass stared at her warily. What exactly had she been brewing?

"Yeah?"

Loula-Anne gathered that little bundle out of her lap and into her hands and held them out to him.

"Well, I knew you missed him when you was out doing your milking in the mornings, and we need to do something to get rid of them rats."

It was a kitten or something resembling one. The grey and white fur was covered in dirt and sandspurs and grass. It had to be the ugliest baby anything he'd ever seen in his life, and that was including hogs. He scowled.

"Damn it, Loula. Why'd you go and do something crazy like that for?"

Loula-Anne's face clouded over like the last storm of summer. She placed the cat gently on the steps and patted its tiny head once. Then she turned to Bass.

"Sebastian Andrew Corbett."

Her tan, wrinkled arms flew up to her hips, and for a second it seemed as if she was still that little girl across the schoolyard.

"If you want to use that language over in town or in the fields, you go right ahead, but I ain't gonna have it on my porch or in my house."

Bass tried not to laugh. When she'd chide him like this, it always reminded him of his momma getting onto his daddy about something. His momma's little, five-foot-somethin' frame standing nearly identical to Loula's while she railed on his big ole mountain of a daddy.

Women always think they got us under their thumb, he thought. Strange little beauties. But then he remembered that his daddy always went and sat at the table with his tail between his legs.

"...march right in this house an' sit down, Mr. Corbett. We are keepin' this cat. Shoot, I already got a name picked out."

For whatever reason, his feet began moving up the steps of their own volition. Guess they'd gotten shamed enough.

"Well, what is it?"

"Princess."

Then she scooped up the kitten, turned on her heels, opened the holey screen door, and pranced back into the house.

The cat meowed, and Bass realized that he'd just been kneeling on the floor for the past Lord knows how long.

"What're you looking at?" he snapped at the cat in a deep, bass voice made even deeper by a half century of smoking.

Princess just kept right on staring, green eyes not blinking.

Bass's knees had started bothering him sometime during his reminiscences. Maybe when he was pulling off the main highway onto that tiny patch of dirt amidst a mass of kudzu covered trees, or maybe when he was out in the field priming tobacco. Bass couldn't remember when exactly the pain started. His mind wasn't what it used to be, but Loula always said that he was still sharper than half the people in this town.

Loula. It didn't matter if his knees were aching or not; he had to clean up this mess. She hated a dirty house, always had. And the house was dirty. He had to clean it up before she got home.

Bass stood up, bracing one corded hand on a solid thigh.

She had gone on a trip.

He reached for the old red broom.

She was gonna be back home soon.

Bass started sweeping up the pieces of broken, brown clay.

Bass stopped; he couldn't remember where she'd gone to.

Maybe her sister's.

No, her sister had died a couple summers ago.

Died.

Died.

Bass remembered Loula hooked up to tubes and needles, her once beautiful, thick, white hair only clinging to her scalp in tufts. He remembered the mask they put over her gap-toothed smile so that she could breathe. Lung cancer. The doctor had said that they were just now realizing the effects tobacco has on the human body. It was because of her smoking all those years, he had said. Bass had felt like he'd been belly shot. It was his fault. He had let Loula take her first drag off a cigarette back in fifth grade. He was the one who gave her the cancer.

Bass felt a sharp stab of pain shooting into his palm and something wet on his face, and he realized he was crying and he was bleeding and he'd broke Loula's broom, but it didn't matter anymore because Loula was dead and it was all his fault. He looked at his hands through tear-streaked eyes and saw the splinters embedded deep into the skin. He picked up the jagged, red piece of wood and then looked over at the cat. She had stopped her licking and just stared at him with those eyes. Those preacher-cat eyes.

You killed her.

You murdered her.

Murderer.

Murderer.

Sins he didn't think he could ever commit floated up in his mind, and he knew what he had to do.

Still looking at the cat, Bass plunged that piece of wood straight into his gut.

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Bass woke up gasping.

Loula.

He'd killed himself.

Loula.

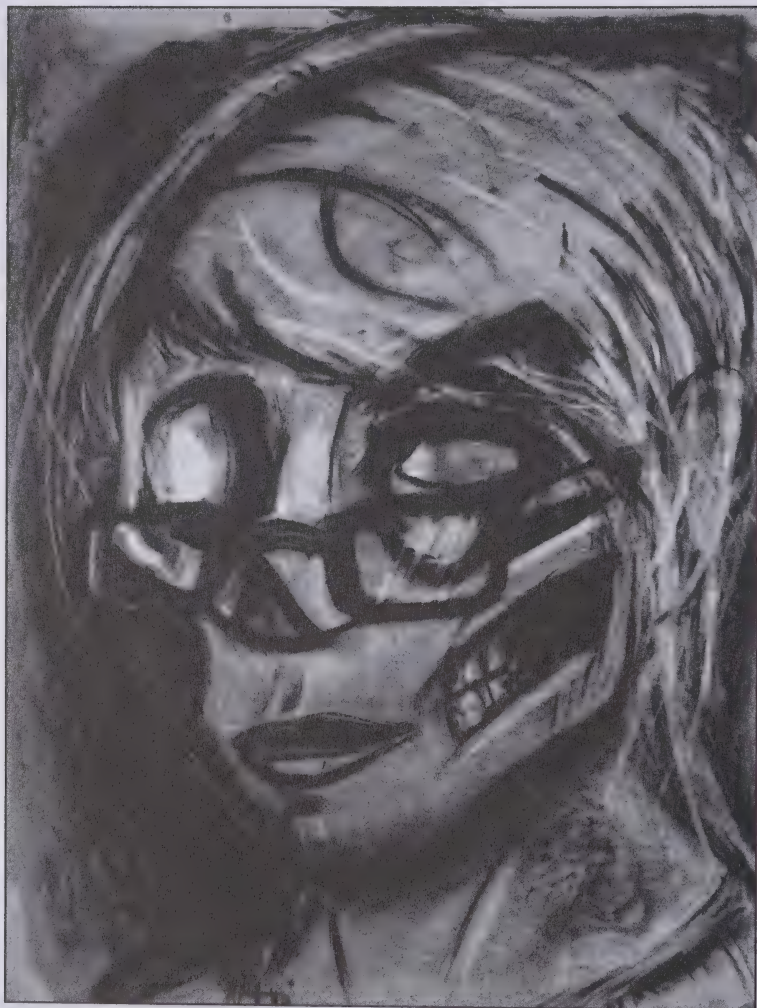
A steady drip drip sounded, almost like the leaky faucet back home. But Bass wasn't home.

A beeping noise went off every couple of seconds, like that newfangled microwave Loula had made him get. But it wasn't a microwave. Microwaves didn't have wavy lines running across the front.

A light shone under the closed door; Loula never left the light on. He never left the light on. Electricity cost too damn much. But it wasn't Bass who was paying the electric bill.

Bass tried to sit up, find someone to explain to him what was going on, but his stomach felt like it had been ripped in two and he had too many tubes hooked up to him to go anywhere. He tried to cry out, but the mask over his mouth stopped him. Bass brought his fist to his face and cried silent tears.

A full harvest moon shone through the barred window and cast shadows onto the cold linoleum. The thick, plastic window blinds diluted the low hum of semis and loud music, but they still could be heard. Off in the distance, a dog howled. Or maybe a coyote. They'd been getting bad this year.



DILLON GROSS

SECOND PLACE ~ ART



# Adam's Ale

RACHEL HARBAUGH  
SECOND PLACE ~ POETRY

"Always go to church."

White-haired grandmas with feet

That never tapped along with a

Beat-up banjo tell you as you sit by

Their cotton-skirted knees

While you shell peas

As the old hunting dog traipses

Around in the sour weed and stray

Cotton looking for the mole his

Half-blind eyes caught sight of

Two nights ago.

But they never tell you about the way

Church can make you feel;

Cold, oak pews leaving

Indentations on the back of your thighs

As other people's white-haired grandmas

Whisper amongst themselves

About what you were doing over by

Nantahala on Friday night

While "I Fly Away" and "Nothin' but the Blood"

Play in the background.

Then the grandma with store-bought

Brown hair who tries to play the organ but can

Barely reach the pedals with her

Tar-stained, pantyhose-covered bare feet starts to

Pump out

"When We All Get to Heaven"

But the old women know that not all the people in the little

Backwoods Baptist church are getting to heaven

And maybe they're right.

Because you disobeyed your grandma and clutched onto a big, old man

With broad shoulders and blue eyes and beat-up hands

That made you feel alive

Instead of clutching onto your dusty old *New King James*

That your momma and daddy gave you the day the

Old, bald-headed preacher tried to drown you in the river,

So you could be washed in the blood

But you'd rather be washed in

Whiskey and mountain water.

You disappointed your grandma and your gut

Is aching

And you want to make her happy and go

Back to shelling snap-peas on the back porch

But you've grown up and gone heathen and

You can't ever go back to the home-place when

The kudzu takes over.

# Risking Forgiveness

MARY R. HEBRANK

## SECOND PLACE ~ SHORT STORY

"Flight attendants, prepare for landing."

The seatbelt sign glowed red overhead as the landing gear whirled beneath my feet. I was going home, whatever that meant. I felt my throat tighten, and a sudden, desperate need for real air overcame me as I pictured the gathering that awaited me on the ground.

Last night my phone had rung. Sure that it was my sister Jane, who had called every night for a week, I stayed in my seat. As the ringing continued, I felt the knot in my stomach grow tighter until finally the phone fell silent. Then I got up to hear what message she had left this time.

"For God's sake, Melissa, he's dying! How can you just sit there? Please get your sorry, skinny butt down here before it's too late."

Before it's too late, I thought grimly. Too late for what? Forgiveness? Can't forgiveness be awarded posthumously, like a war medal, a recognition of wounds obtained in the line of duty—most of them fatal, sooner or later?

According to the previous night's report from Jane, my father was in a coma. I doubted that he wanted or needed my forgiveness now. So what did my family really want of me? My more cynical side considered that a mere appearance would do. An appearance of the happy, upper-middle-class family mourning the loss of its patriarch. "Sorry, Jane," I muttered in the general direction of the phone. "It's already too late." I gave up on that picture three years ago.

I deleted her message, but Jane's irate words echoed in my mind. I realized then that the knot in my stomach was accompanied by shoulders that were hunched up around my neck. So I did what I always do: pulled on my tights and running shoes and took off out the door.

I love running at night, the darker the better, and rain is good, too, as long as it's anything short, of a downpour. I'm almost invisible in my black tights and shirt, with only their short reflecting stripes on the wrists and ankles as token concessions to motorists. What do I care if they see me? I'll see their headlights long before that happens, and then I can choose whether to get out of the way or not.

My feet thwapped the pavement in their usual fast rhythm, a rhythm I know as well as my own heartbeat. I always run especially far on nights like last night, wearing myself out, untying the knots in my stomach, shoulders, and mind. Who was I running from? Jane, or my father? I couldn't decide, but I felt the muscles in my legs working, making smooth, strong strides, and I was comforted in my belief that I could, indeed, outrun anything. At least, at night I could.

If I run in the warm sunshine, there is an image I can never outrun, an image of a bright, spring day, the first nice day of the year. A day to be outside, to feel sun on skin. A day when a young couple and their toddler son are going to visit the boy's grandparents

across town, and because the day is so fine, they lovingly tuck the child into a brand-new bike seat behind his father and pedal off through the quiet, suburban neighborhood.

The boy is delighted. He pats his father's back. He turns his blond head, encased in a white bubble of a helmet, and makes sure his mother is still behind him. When they go down a hill, he squints his eyes against the wind. He points to sparrows on a telephone wire and says "birdy." All those times he traveled in a car seat, he couldn't see them, and he wonders if they've always been there, just beyond his vision.

The mother can't keep her eyes off the little boy, and she smiles as she begins to see things from his perspective, a world that is fresh and new, filled with wonder after wonder. The way the tires make a funny sound when they go over a manhole cover, the way the long shady stretches of road feel cooler than the bright, sunny ones, the way a mourning dove whirls in alarm as it takes flight from the gutter where it had been foraging.

After a while the boy grows sleepy, and his head comes to rest against his father's back, which is now damp with perspiration. The family is nearing Grandma's house, and they are moving slowly up a long hill. The mother has fallen a little behind, and she sees a large, silver sedan approaching—too fast—the intersection ahead. In a flash she recognizes it as her father's car, and in the same instant, she knows he is drunk, at two in the afternoon. She screams to her husband as the silver machine, oblivious to the stop sign, rolls on through the intersection and destroys all that she loves most.

In the bright light of day, the image, both golden and terrible, is all too real and all too close at hand, always nipping at my heels. At night, it is a nightmare, but one from another night, not this one. I can run away from it at night.

So last night I ran. I ran fast, mile after mile, consuming the anger Jane's call brought, until I became gradually and predictably numb. Normally, I'd have turned back and been almost home by that point, but not last night. With the numbness came something new, something that was happening to my eyes. As I ran on, the straight-ahead, tunnel vision to which I had become so accustomed began to open, and I became aware of things on either side of me. As if for the first time, I took notice of the houses glowing with light behind soft curtains, bicycles hastily abandoned on a porch, a basketball waiting beneath a crooked hoop.

I thought of Jane's words again, but now with less rancor. An old man lay dying of cirrhosis. His long-suffering wife, my mother, both victim and enabler, was at his bedside. My siblings, whose childhoods were no easier than my own, had come many miles to see him off. I was sure we had nothing in common: my sister Jane, the oldest, the lawyer whose star was still rising, and whose connections had saved my father's neck more than once; my brother, Thomas, the banker turned school teacher, my mother's favorite and my father's disappointment; another sister Ellie, a programmer who was as close to a recluse as one can be without arousing the nervous suspicion of her neighbors. None had married; none had even come close. I, the youngest, was the only one foolish enough to risk losing everything.

On I ran, although not as quickly as before. As I turned the corner, a side door opened in the house closest to me. In the pool of light, a dark form leaned out, and I heard the



clank of glass bottles landing in a recycling bin. My head snapped up at the sound, and my eyes opened wide. I knew then what we had in common, my siblings and I.

We all blamed ourselves. Our inordinate efforts to be perfect children hadn't stopped our father's drinking, hadn't stopped the broken promises, hadn't stopped our mother's tears. Our A's in school, our sports trophies, our merit badges, and all the love we had for one man were no match for a fifth of vodka.

So what, then, did it take to grant forgiveness? I stopped running and stood on the curb, panting and dizzy. I put my hands on my hips and bent over until the dizziness passed.

I'd have to forgive myself first.

I turned and started the long walk home.



BEN BILLER

## As We Stood There

GEORGE FRIZZELL

As we stood there  
dutifully bowing our heads  
in unison

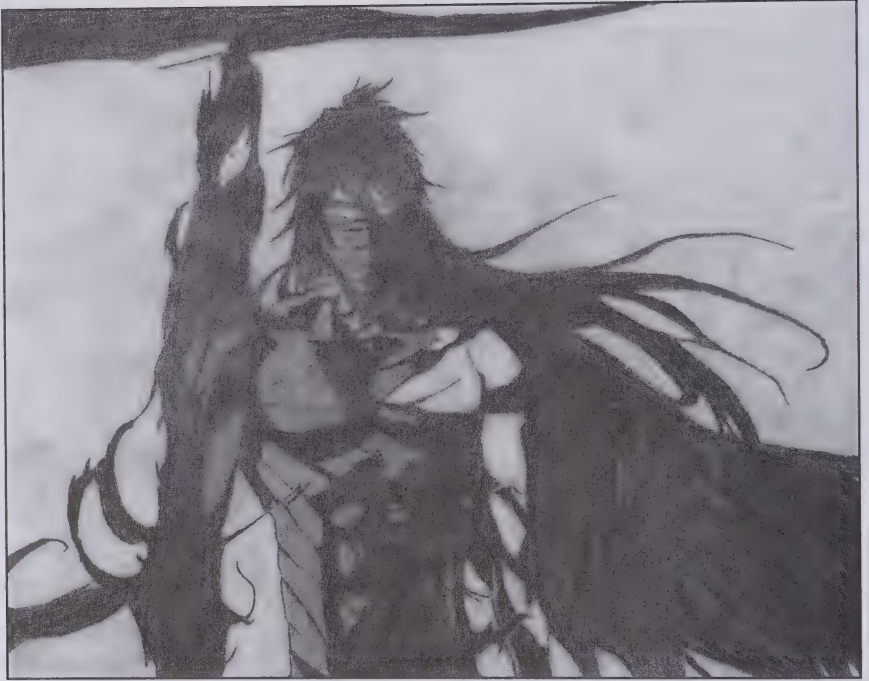
As the preacher asked  
"Let us pray"

Pale blue sky  
cloudless sun

Even rows of headstones  
of polished stones  
or even river rock

The trimmed grass  
the ironed shirts  
and pressed dresses

Your life was never  
so orderly



CODY WANG



# The Good Doctor

DAN FERGUSON

"Mr. Roberts?" the voice on the telephone asked.

"This is he," replied Bill Roberts, a lanky man with thick-rimmed glasses, mild social anxiety, and a failing liver.

"This is Dr. Salvos calling from St. John's. How are you?"

"Well, uh...I... I'm good. I guess. How are you?" he stammered. The hard, neon shapes of the clock of the microwave illuminated the kitchen tiles as he stood in the dark kitchen holding the cordless phone.

Sensing Bill's awkwardness, the doctor gave a comforting laugh. "Mr. Roberts, I have great news! I will be the doctor performing your transplant operation. We've found a match!"

Bill couldn't believe what he was hearing. It had been a year and a half since his first dialysis, and it had since become a fixed part of his routine. He stood slack-jawed in the kitchen of his third-story apartment as he imagined all the things that had changed in his life since he had started dialysis; the most salient memory was that of losing his wife....

Bill didn't quite remember ever meeting a "Dr. Salvos," but then again, he had met with so many doctors over the past year that they all blended together into an amorphous blob, without race, color, or gender—a faceless monster.

It was as if the doctor knew Bill's attention had drifted. Bill's thoughts lingered on Anne as the doctor started to speak again. "But, Mr. Roberts, if we are to proceed, we must do so now. You must get down here quickly. We only have a few hours to get everything done."

"Oh, yes, Doctor. Of course, of course!" Roberts replied with newfound vigor. Having returned from the brink of death, he now had more energy than when he had a functioning liver. Excitement radiated through his voice.

"You'll need to come to our satellite facility," said the doctor, giving Mr. Roberts the address. "Everything has been taken care of; I just need you," the doctor coaxed the still surprised and nervous Bill. "I am just as excited about this as you are," the doctor assured him. A devilish smile spread across his face.

\*\*\* \*\*

Spencer writhed and withered in pain. The leather restraints that held his arms down were wrapped tightly around his wrists. These served to keep him from pulling any of the

multiple IVs from his arms and made it impossible to even think about escape. Not that he could run very far anyway without a lung, kidney, and spleen. The stitches would come undone, and the rest of his organs might fall out; it just wasn't practical.

The removals had been surgically precise, with great care taken to sterilize the instruments and prevent any sort of infection.

Spencer wished he were dead. However, as his captor reminded him constantly during the three days he had been held there, he still had more to do, still "had to serve his penance; it was for the greater good." These phrases were slowly becoming as empty as his abdomen.

Spencer lay on his hospital bed as the machines that were monitoring him and keeping him alive beeped monotonously. While Spencer found his whole predicament rather strange, he couldn't help but to dwell on the Cyrillic lettering on the monitoring machines. Maybe it was because his body was beginning to shut down and was trying to go into shock. However, the thought remained: I am still in America, right?

The sterile white room that had become Spencer's existence was devoid of personal effects; the windowless room had only one large mirror, which Spencer could only assume was a one-way mirror for his captor to have panoptic control over him.

This is where I will die, Spencer began to tell himself. The cold realization of his own mortality started to sink in when his captor turned the lock and pushed open the door to his would-be mausoleum.

"We have a visitor," the grinning captor said as he poked his head around the door and smiled as Spencer tried to scream through the stitches that clamped his lips together.

\*\*\* \*\*

Bill pulled into the circular roundabout in front of the old outpatient office near the edge of the city limits. Though the lights were on, the place looked abandoned. Ahead of him, the bushes were engulfed in the brightness of his head beams. As he turned them off, he saw the darkness creep back over those bushes and regain what was rightfully theirs.

Bill sat in the front seat, readying himself. "This is it," he thought, unfocused as he unbuckled his seatbelt. He began to open his door when a shadowy figure threw open the door and stuck a syringe in his neck, rendering him unconscious.

\*\*\* \*\*

Bill awoke the following morning in the passenger seat of his car. His car was parked outside of the local pharmacy. His side felt like it had been stabbed.

Taped to the steering wheel was a plain, white envelope. Unsure of what was going on, trying to find some sort of landmark as he waded through this swamp of mental fog, he opened the envelope.

Enclosed were the following contents:

- A year's worth of immunosuppressant prescriptions
- A month's worth of painkillers
- A newspaper clipping
- A letter, which read as follows:

Mr. Roberts,

Please excuse my horrible bedside manner. I wish I had been able to be there with you when you awoke, but I'm afraid I had more pressing matters to tie up. Please enjoy your new lease on life.

Be good.

Dr. S

The letter only heightened Bill's confusion—that is, until he read the newspaper clipping: February 3, *The Daily Grind*

Recently paroled child molester Spencer Wright still missing after four days. While it is undetermined if he has fled the area, his ankle monitor was retrieved from a local lake. This makes the sixth paroled criminal to go missing in six weeks. It is still unclear if foul play is involved.

\*\*\* \*\*

Spencer awoke in pain with another scar on his side. The trauma of the surgery blurred his vision and put him into a light stupor. Colors and shapes blended together, combining with sounds that slowed and sped unpredictably. Spencer presumed his throbbing migraine was from the bright florescent tubes above him emitting their harsh white, light. Why couldn't he just take out my brain? Amidst all this, spots were missing from his vision, small circles that gradually were filled by the surrounding colors.

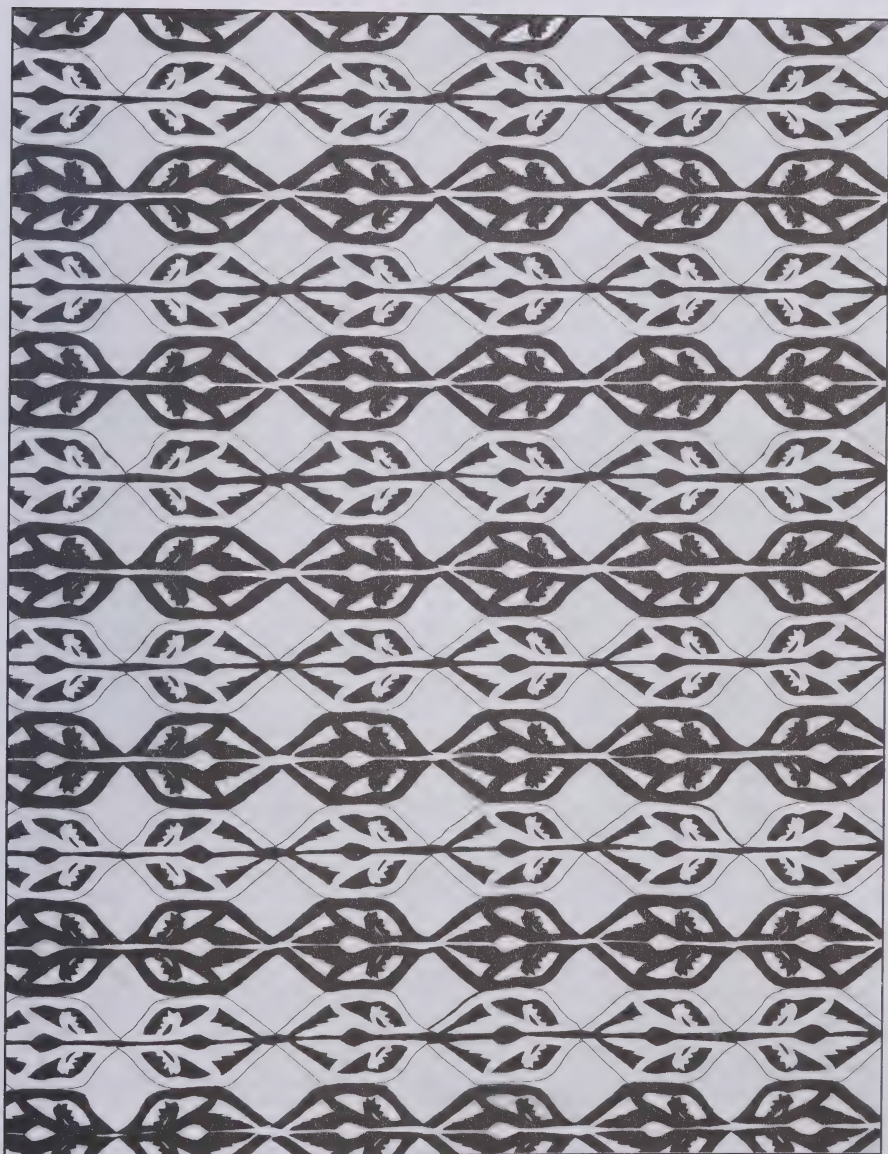
The captor's voice came from behind him. While Spencer missed the first part of the conversation, he knew it was the same as the others.

"I have great news! We found a donor! We found a heart for you, Ms. Jones!"

## Stairwell

JENNIFER HIPPENSTEEL

A stairwell makes for the perfect  
Amplifier of four-part harmony.  
Added breath creates exponential volume,  
Every voice in its place.  
Even the silence seemed to sing sympathetically  
In our ears, in the walls, in the steps we stooped upon.  
Each chord surrounded us,  
Snaking through us and shaking us.  
It broke us with its beauty.  
It connected us.  
It wasn't even weird to make eye contact  
Through the bouncing sound, in the middle of the stairs.  
Our voices, on different notes but blended,  
Our eyes automatically drifting up to the ceiling  
As we counted off a scale, up and up.  
I'd like to think that our voices created  
Waves of sound  
That are still moving through the walls,  
Through the air,  
Through the stairwell,  
Through us.



RACHEL MURFELLO



## Ninety Minutes, Nine Days

DEANNA K. KLINGEL

Ninety minutes ago I left my home  
 Winding and curving my descent to I-40 Eastbound where I'll spend much of the day  
 Tires on the pavement, already monotonous  
 Passing Asheville I glimpse a parting view of our mountains  
 Deep purple silhouette  
 From every ridge white wisps of sprite-like cloud reach upward  
 Absorbed into the new day  
 Rain clouds torn apart reveal ragged patches of blue  
 Like a lacy shawl over the chilly shoulders of the Blue Ridge.  
 I feel the magnetic tug.  
 This vision will be mine nine hours from now when I unpack my car  
 The magnetic pull will nudge every day I am away.  
 Nine days from now in late afternoon  
 I will pass this place again on I-40 Westbound  
 Passing Asheville my first glimpse of our mountains  
 I'll know that in my absence fall arrived in full  
 The silhouette painted crimson red  
 Hickory and Poplar pin gold brooches to the breast of our mountain.  
 She is stunning.  
 The magnet pulls from the core of the mountain to the inner core of me  
 Tires on the pavement hum  
 Near breathless with anticipation  
 Winding, curving, my ascent begins  
 Back up to the plateau I call home  
 Hidden deep in the Blue Ridge



KATHY WILSON



# CHLOE COLLINS

## Hiking Blue Valley

BETTY HOLT

How blessed I am  
To be alive on this day  
As I travel downhill  
Through deep pine woods  
Onto a quiet country lane  
Tree frogs and katydids  
Sound faintly in the distance  
A cerulean sky overhead  
Gazes down at changing fall colors  
Crisp autumn air  
Finds its way up my nostrils  
My eyes locate goldenrod,  
Purple aster, and those lovely  
Tiny deep pink flowers growing in abundance  
Along the trail  
Surely at this place on the planet  
In these moments  
God is in His heaven  
Surveying his wondrous creation  
And He is pleased.



## Pull, Pull, Tug

ALLIE MATHEWS

With her shoes in her hands, I am watching my six-year-old dance. The hem of her dress gently skims the grass. She's still so innocent. I can only hope it stays with her for a little while longer. She took an apple jam jar from the kitchen outside once she finished her dinner and is now chasing the fireflies on the back lawn. I turn away from her dancing, flicking the ash of my cigarette into the ash tray, and I study my husband through the sliding glass door as he watches a game and shouts at the television. Everyone says to me what a wonderful man he is. How lucky I am to have him in my life and as my husband. If only they knew. If not for Megan, Joe's little princess, I'd be gone by now. With my ankles beginning to hurt, I uncross them from underneath me, lowering my feet to the floor as I get up from the porch swing. I walk over to the cherry wood railing and rest my elbows on the posts.

My thirteen-year-old marriage is gone. Two years ago is when it all began to slip away. The accusations, the fights that became physical, and the burn of him etched into me. He can't stand that I'm the breadwinner now. Getting laid off at the plant changed him. He can't find work, not that he tries too hard. Yet it's my fault that he's in this situation. If I worked less and got paid less, he'd be trying harder to find a job.

I tell myself I'll leave. He comes at me one more time, and I'm gone. But then it's one more day in hell and a fake smile to keep my child from knowing, from seeing her mother in pain. He doesn't touch her; he takes out all his frustrations on me. Megan's his beautiful girl that can do no wrong.

He says if I tell anyone about what he does to me, he'll kill us. If we run, he'll find us. I don't want to believe that. Yet, I haven't left because of what he's said. I'd rather have Megan alive and well, with myself a hardened shell, than have both of us dead.

It was fifteen hours, and some odd minutes since the last time. The burn of the belt still lingers on my legs, and the stinging throb pulses on my cheek, but the loose skirt and cool breeze assuages the pain. My eyes glaze. I wish the moment could be erased from my memory, but it can't. My pride took another beating. There's no way I could go to anyone I know. They would not believe me. Or they'd accuse me of being a terrible mother, saying I could have left long ago. Why hadn't I left? I asked myself that every day. I'm still trying to find the answer.

Yesterday had been terrible. I barely walked in the door when he started in on me.

"Where'd you put my keys?"

I closed my eyes to calm the nerves that began to knot my muscles. Please, Lord, let me find them fast. "Honey, I just got home from work and picking Megan up from school. I

don't know where they are. I'll look for them right now."

"Don't you honey me, you worthless piece of shit. I know you took my keys. And you're damn right to look for 'em."

I scanned the vicinity of the living room. They weren't on the television, the coffee table, the side table, or either of the sofas. I hurried into the kitchen, eyeing the kitchen counter, table, and even inside the refrigerator. Out of the kitchen and past the living room, I went into our bedroom and glanced at the bed and the dresser drawers. I headed into our bathroom. Not on the counter.

"Where the fuck are my keys?"

I prayed that Megan wasn't inside yet, that she was still playing in her sandbox on the back deck. God, I didn't want her to see this. I frantically searched her room, the guest room, the other bathroom and den. Nothing.

I heard the recliner shut with a loud thunk. Oh God, no. I searched. I looked everywhere. Everywhere. Nothing. Oh God, no. I was back in our bedroom searching through drawers when I stopped. I could feel his presence, his disapproval. I turned around to see him blocking the doorway.

"Why the hell do I put up with you? You can't even remember where you put my keys. You're pathetic. This whole goddamned place is pathetic. And what the fuck are you looking at?" His voice rose as he approached me and grabbed my wrists, holding them together in one of his hands.

I looked up at him desperately, trying not to panic. "I—I—I'll find them right now, Joe; I swear it. Please just give me three more minutes and I'll—"

"You're telling me what to do now, are you? Come here." He dragged me over to the bed and pushed me down. "I'll show you."

His pants. His pants were lying on the corner of the bed. He'd changed into sweatpants. His keys might be in the jeans. I moved slightly, trying to reach them, and that's when he backhanded me. I tried to regain my composure.

"I'll show you, you little bitch."

I couldn't focus. My eyes misted over. In a haze, I saw him lift his jeans and slide his belt from them. The weight on the bed shifted. He'd gotten up. I started crying. He started yanking at my work slacks. Pull, pull, tug. I was wearing a belt. His face transformed into a mask of anger and hate. Pull, pull, tug. I kept crying.

"Stop. Please. I'm sorry. Please."

Pull, pull, tug. He stopped. He breathed heavily.

"You're sorry are you? Get on your stomach."

My body trembled. I couldn't move.

"Move!"

I jumped up, right off the bed. I landed back on it and flipped over onto my stomach. I felt him get on the bed. He shifted beside me.

"When was the last time I used the belt on you, hm? Can you remember? Answer me!"

"Twen—twenty days." I hiccupped between tears.

"To repent your sins, it's twenty licks. Count them out loud."

The sudden feeling of hundreds of thousands of fire ants crawling and biting the back of my calves was excruciating.

God.

"Count!"

The snap of his belt was drowned out by my scream.

"One!"

Help me.

"Count, damn it!"

"Two!"

I whimpered out each number, my voice hoarse. "Eighteen."

I turned my head toward the bedroom door. It was ajar. Megan. Oh God. She stood stock still, holding her doll Pammy at her side. I could see her tears.

"Nineteen."

Megan dropped Pammy and ran.

"Twenty." My voice was hardly a whisper. I was so hoarse. I barely heard the sliding glass door, and I prayed she escaped into the beltway of woods on the outskirts of our property.

I hardly felt him leave the bed. I didn't notice him exit the room. My eyes focused on his jeans. I saw the tip of a brass key sticking out of the front right pocket. Bastard. I closed my eyes, unconscious.

I feel a tugging on my skirt and look down to see Megan holding Pammy in one hand and a jar in the other; at least thirty fireflies flash at me. She's trapped the fireflies in a jar without holes in the cap.

"Sweetie, they'll suffocate like this. We need to let them out."

I grasp the jar with one hand, and take her free hand in mine, holding it in my grasp. We walk off the porch and into the backyard.

"Where do you want them to go?"

She points toward the woods. The damp grass feels cool under my bare feet as we walk to the woods to release the fireflies.

I uncap the lid, turn over the jar, and shake it. We watch as the fireflies leave the jar, flying away, flashing their goodbyes.

"Mommy, Pammy's scared."

I sigh, knowing that I've caused her pain. I close my eyes and calm myself, trying to regroup.

Fireflies flash around us for a few minutes before I grab Megan's hand. "Come on, Sweetie, let's go back inside."

I guide us back onto the porch, sliding the glass door open and closed.



CHELBIE SAMUEL



SHARON MESSICK





ANGELA TURNER

## The Hills Remember

WESLEY SATTERWHITE

The hills remember.  
They hold their memories like women  
in their rounded hips  
and the deep hollow places between  
the curved ridges  
where the waters run dark sometimes.

The hills remember.  
They hold their scars like women  
marked by the hard and careless grip of men,  
stone-faced and silent, broken and strong.

The hills remember.  
They hold the battles of possession like women  
in the caves of their hearts  
and the soft, fertile bellies  
where shards of history imbed  
to reveal themselves with time.

The hills remember.  
They hold the truth like old women  
in the gray headwaters,  
through waterfalls of knowing  
and the flooded valleys of forgetting.

The hills remember. Like women.



JONQUIL MURPHY-KRAL

## In the Days of June Bugs

GEORGE FRIZZELL

The old barn is gone  
     a victim  
         of time  
         and weather

The old barn  
     playing with cousins  
         building "forts" of hay bales  
     or the grandparents' chores  
         the milk cow and the mule

Gathering eggs was easy  
     feeding chickens was fun  
 Calling out "here, chick, chick, chick"  
     the hens came running  
         some with their baby deedies in tow

The rooster, aloof  
     and alone

Later, at evening  
     fireflies in the fields  
         the frogs' serenade  
         at the tadpole hole

In the days of June bugs  
     of chinquapins  
         and bumble bees

In the days we were young  
     but the old barn is gone



ZACHARY MILLIS



## The Last Snow

ROBERT BOYD SATTERWHITE

Pops was dying. He'd had one lung removed, but the surgery didn't remove all the cancer. It was spreading like rot, eating his insides. When I would visit and ask how he was doing, his usual response was, "Just waiting to die, Son." From daylight to dark, he sat in his recliner watching television, anything that was on—passing time. He had stopped taking his chemo treatments, complaining they didn't do any good. "They just make me feel worse."

"The only time he gets out of that chair is to go the bathroom," Mom said. She shook her head. "He won't come to the table to eat, and he hasn't been outside in weeks. I don't know what to do."

"There's nothing you can do, Mom," I said. "Let him be. That's what he wants."

"He won't even get up when Emily comes on Saturday mornings. He just sits and watches cartoons with her."

Emily is my five-year-old daughter and Pops' favorite grandchild.

On a Friday in late February, snow began falling during the night, and by Saturday morning, we had at least six inches, a heavy, wet snow that created a classic Christmas-card scene. Pops' home was above our house, overlooking a broad, steep hill that once was part of a pasture that held Angus cattle, back when Pops was farming. The steep hill flattened out at the bottom and was ideal for sledding—a long, steep run and a slow finish. A road at the bottom wound back up the hill to Pops' house—a longer but easier route to the top of the hill. By mid-morning, we had a dozen or more kids sledding down the hill. My wife, Joyce, busied herself in the kitchen making hot chocolate for the sledders. Emily put on her snow suit and boots and dragged her sled up the road, her little legs sinking knee-deep in the snow.

When she reached the top, she ran from kid to kid. "Slide with me," she begged, but the older children ignored her pleas. "Please slide with me. Please."

I went out on the deck and yelled, "Somebody let Emily slide." The kids ignored me also.

I saw Pops standing on his deck watching the sledders, surprised to see him out in the cold.

"What the heck," I said and dressed and went out on the porch, ready to go up the hill and sled with Emily. Pops was on his deck, wearing his old Mackinaw, a ratty cap with earflaps, and his rubber Wellingtons. I thought he was just watching the kids sled and started up the hill.

"Slide with me, Grandpa," Emily said. "Please."

Pops walked stiffly down the steps. He took Emily's sled, pointed it down the hill, sat down on the sled, and placed Emily in his lap. He pushed off with his hands, and they slid down the hill together, Emily screaming in delight. When they reached the bottom, Emily grabbed Pops' hand. "Again, Grandpa. Let's do it again." With Pops pulling the sled with one hand and holding Emily's hand with the other, they slowly made their way around the road, back to the top of the hill.

Before I was out of the yard, Joyce called me. "Your mother's on the phone." I went back to the house.

"Rob, do something about your father," Mom said. "The old fool's going to get pneumonia or break his hip or something. He's got no business being out in this kind of weather."

"Okay," I said. "I'll check on him."

"Is something wrong with your father?" Joyce asked.

"Not really. He's sledding with Emily."

"Sledding? Him?"

"Yeah. You know how he dotes on her."

"You'd better go up there."

I waited at the bottom of the hill as Pops and Emily came sliding down a second time.

"Want me to ride with her, Pops?"

"Nope," he said. "We're going down one more time."

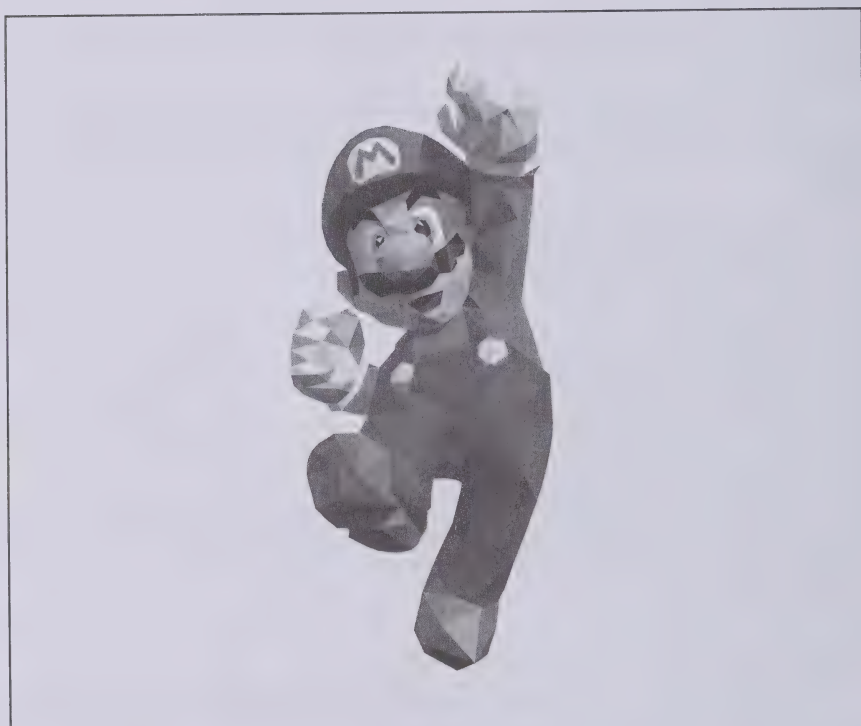
Later, I walked up the hill to check on Pops. He was sitting in his recliner drinking coffee. Other than a ruddier-than-usual face, he looked fine.

"You okay, Pops?"

"Fine," he said. "Just fine."

He reached for his remote and turned on the television.

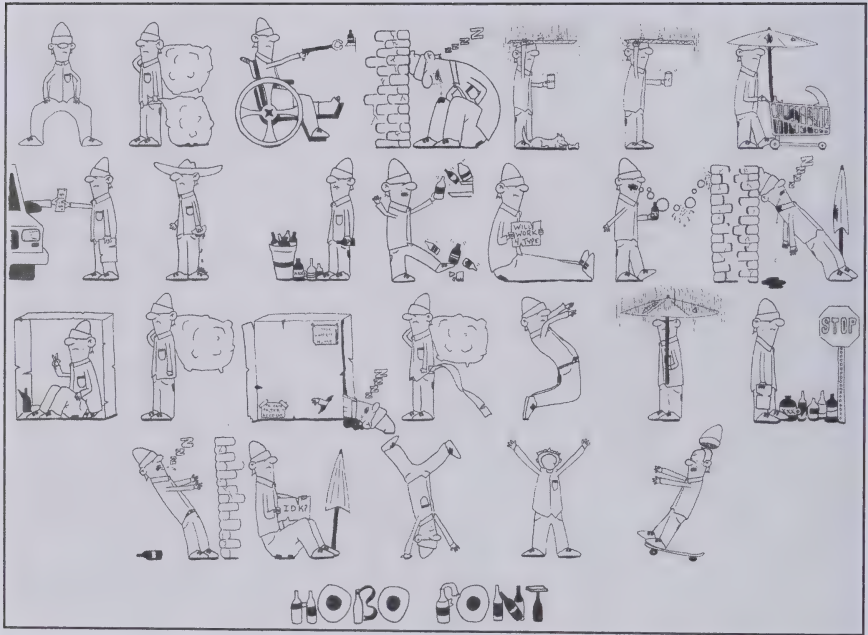
That was the last big snow of the winter and the last time Pops left the house. He died in the spring, sitting in his recliner watching television.



GERMAIN FUENTES-ORNELAS



SUMMER MAXWELL



JOSH BERQUIST



## Highway Signs

DEANNA K. KLINGEL

Green signs mark places and miles

Like old stone cairns and stiles

*"If you lived here you'd be already home"*

May as well be carved in stone

Towns rural, urban, big and small

The same green signs

Mark them all

Blinkers wink, cars follow the sign

Going home? To work? Something to buy?

The rest, like me, drive on by

Orange cones, yellow lines, blue lights

Colors blur the traveler's delight

It's not the destination

But the journey to and from

Book stores, gas prices, cheap hotels

I keep track along the way

While GPS Gladys plans minutes and miles

To end our stay



ANDREA MINARD



MORGAN NELSON

# Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

MICHAEL REVERE

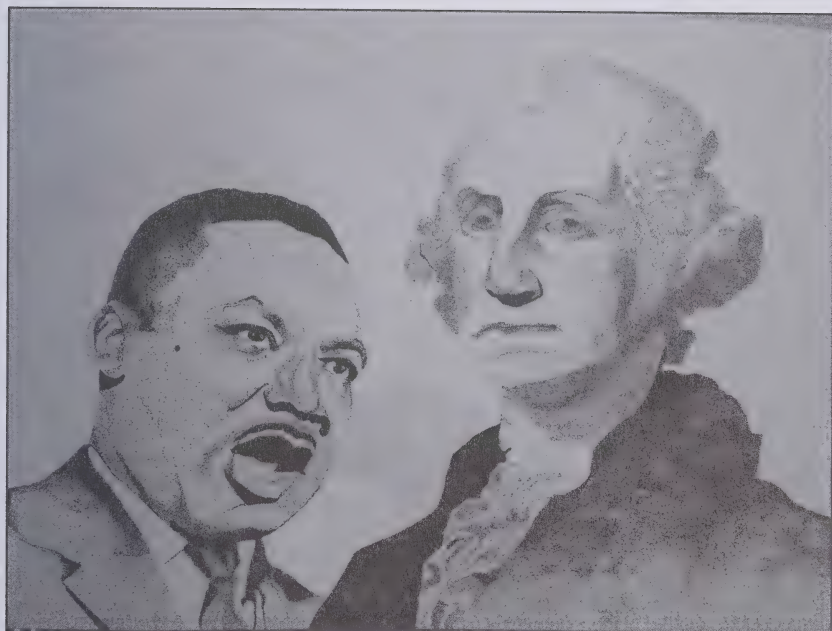
A cloud of sadness comes over me  
 when I hear Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture.  
 The spirit of victory, celebration and raw joy  
       evokes memories of my stepfather, Walter,  
 when he was a handsome, educated young man,  
       a Christian in the most revered and humble  
 sense of the word.  
 When I was eleven years old he rescued me  
 from the living nightmare my childhood had evolved to.  
 Walter shared his love and knowledge  
       for the writings of Edgar Allan Poe, e.e. cummings  
 the King James Bible, a righteous family life  
 and his soulful passion of classical music.  
 Beethoven, Paganini, Handel, Bach  
       And Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky  
 became good household friends.  
 He never hit or cursed me.  
 Walter has never raised his voice to me  
 not even when he bailed me out of jail.  
 He didn't offer hope; he was hope in person  
       consistent as the motion of earth  
 and patient as Job.

Walter now has advanced Parkinson's Disease  
and has more than a hard time  
getting through even the good days.  
But when the great classical composers  
raise their thunder and whip the seas to storm,  
when the cannons fire and explode  
when the parading stallions prance through Moscow  
in perfect syncopation with the brass section,  
when Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky  
once more raises the roof,  
Walter smiles, and hope stays alive.





KAYLA WRIGHT



JOSH SLOCUMB



KAREN SMITH

## Peter, Talk to Heaven

GEORGE FRIZZELL

I don't know what happened  
while sleeping through Armageddon

a love  
even made in heaven  
can fall from grace  
like fallen angels

falling  
like jagged lightning  
they fall  
they burn

angels fallen, they come,  
looking for trouble  
and companionship

a mercy killing

thoughts flash like piranha  
stripping a memory to bare bones  
in seconds

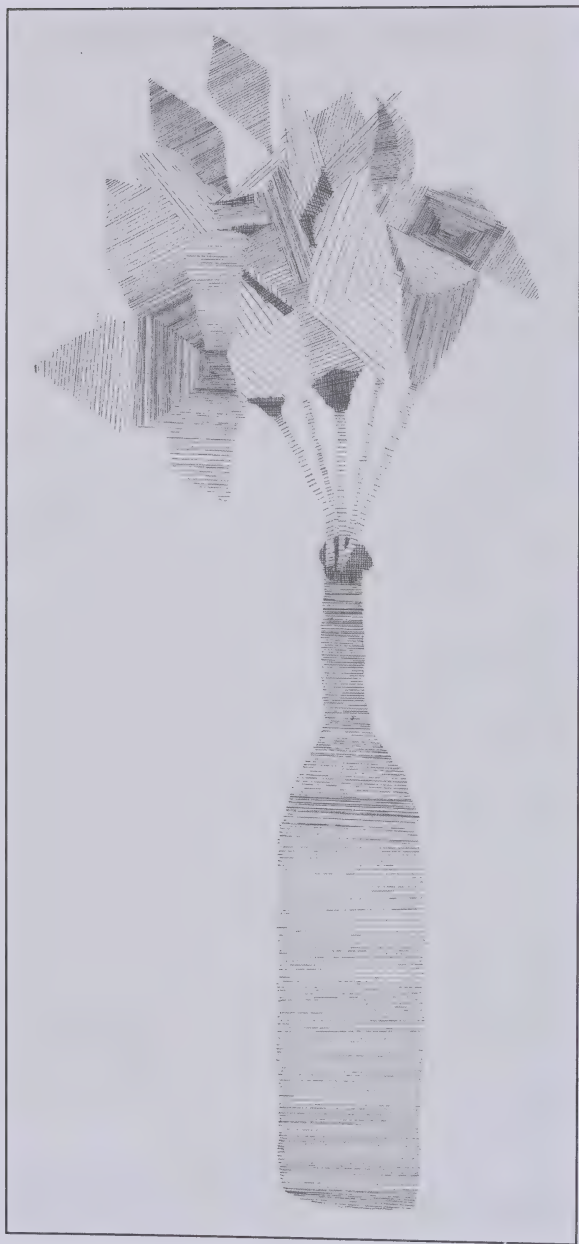
if tomorrow never comes,  
no promises were broken;  
only nighttime was promised

and,  
even now,  
as dawn intrudes on happenstance

I wonder about tomorrow and not today

Peter, talk to Heaven

this may be more than I can stand



MEADOW BYRD



# The Library

LAURA WICKER

Silence. Voices. Everywhere.  
Millions of voices. Chanting.  
Stillness, silence surround me.

Voiceless, they whisper;  
I recognize but a few.

"My mistress's eyes are nothing like the sun,"  
A male voice, familiar, calls  
From a far shelf, left and up a few rows.

"Call me Ishmael.—"  
"—One other thing, Lestrade."  
A crisp voice, immediately recognizable,  
Interrupts the softer, unknown voice from the far right corner.

I wander along rows of lofty wooden shelves,  
comfortably keeping what they were commissioned to hold.

"If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head,"  
The strong voice fading slowly as I turn down a row and walk further along.

"In the beginning," a deep voice booms two rows to my right.  
Yet there was silence,  
All the while  
As I scanned the many names.

"A man in possession of a large fortune,"  
I smile as I hear the playful voice passing by.  
"Oh, Austen, Austen, how I love thee," I think to myself  
Looking up and down the layers of leaves.

"I wear the chain I forged in life...I made it,"  
 I hurried past the column of D's,  
 Trying to ignore those dreadful words  
 coming from those horrid leaves.

I slowed again when I arrived upon the M's,  
 No longer could I hear those detestable D's.  
 "...and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven,"  
 Called a voice directly to my right.

"Independence is my happiness,"  
 My eyes search the columns,  
 My ears unable to identify those wonderful words.  
 I cannot find the quarter from which the leaf sang,  
 Other leaves beginning now to rustle and stir.

"Yet well I know that music hath a far more pleasing sound,"  
 rang a clear, strong voice a few feet above my head.  
 I slow to a stop, arriving at the S's,  
 The voices of T's would soon reach my ears,  
 The leaves I was searching for at home among them.

"Fifteen men on the Dead Man's Chest, Yo-ho!"  
 A jolly voice sang. I looked down slightly,  
 An old vibrant red leaf peering back at me.

"Tom!"  
 A woman's voice nearly shouts in my ear.  
 "Tom!"  
 That voice cries again;  
 I listen more intently,  
 searching,  
 wondering;  
 I move a little to the left.

"TOM!"

The voice, were it audible,  
would have thrown me into the self behind me.  
I crouched to my knees;  
It *had* to be here.

"The old lady pulled her spectacles—"

"Her it is!" I cried out joyously, thoughtlessly.  
Then cringed—I had spoken.  
I had broken the silence.  
No more the hundreds of voices filling my ears.

I pulled the book out from among its peers.  
I stood. Made my way back  
Slipping through the rows of leaves fallen still.

Voices once more tickled my ears,  
Softly, softly,  
They spoke once again.  
I smiled and listened to the cadence of voices,  
Soft then loud,  
Loud then soft.

I wish I could, but I cannot take them all.  
Those voices all chanting  
Surround me,  
But I depart with just one or two,  
I'll return for a few more soon.



BRETT GIBSON



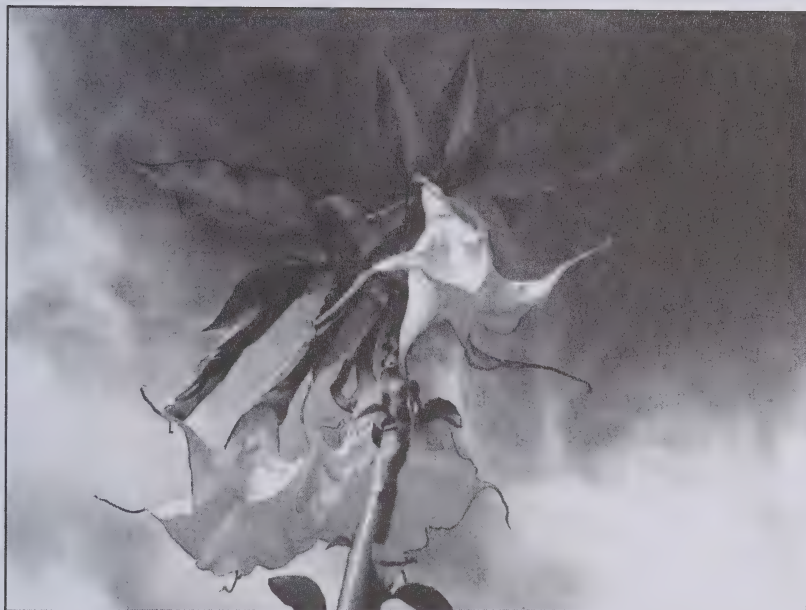
NATE HOPPER



## Untitled

WESLEY SATTERWHITE

They plowed the field today  
as, I suppose, they must,  
a quick-slow turning of radiant rye grass  
to red-brown earth  
in clumps resembling rows, puckering,  
a long dark wound.  
Earlier I walked the woods  
along the back line of this tract  
looking for evidence of trout-lily,  
bloodroot,  
or trillium that might have survived  
my neighbor's chemical warfare against undergrowth,  
his quest to tend beyond his own park estate.  
Now, surveying the tractor  
as it marks its steady lines,  
I thought of the deer  
whose trail I'd seen  
rising from field-edge to cross the branch  
up and over this knob of mountain.  
Were they seeing this, too,  
hidden in the blind of yet-budding branch tangle,  
leaf debris, half-cut  
river cane?  
Did their ears twitch lightly at the sharp lift of  
blade  
and turn?  
Soon will come the relic-hunters  
trudging head-down,  
boot-top deep,  
stopping occasionally to turn over a discovery—  
sharp shard of pottery,  
chipped arrowhead  
or carved tool blank—  
sliding fingers into pockets  
unaware  
that the soft eyes of ancient ones  
are upon them.



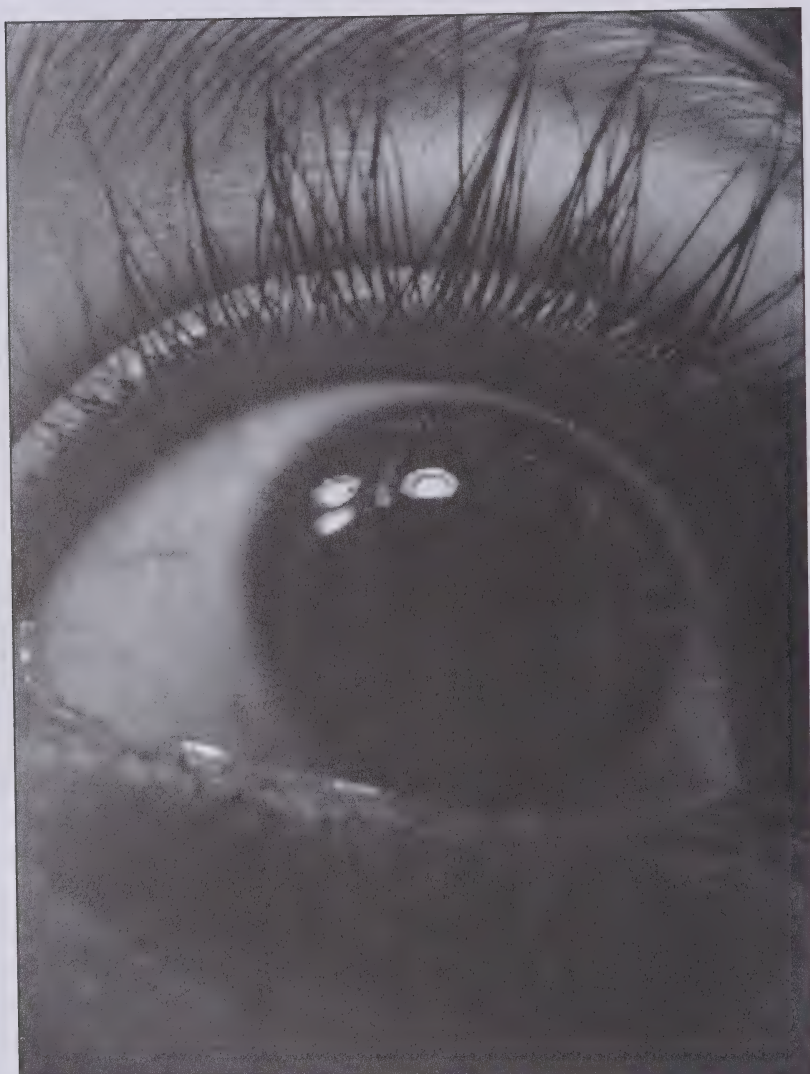
NANCY MINARD



MARGARET OREN

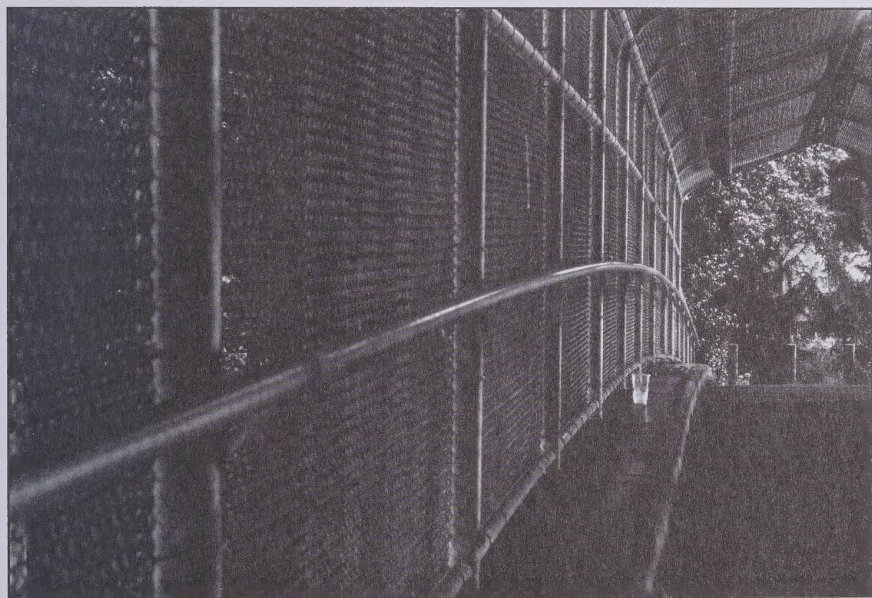


LYDIA BELLAVANCE



MELANIE BROOM





## SAMANTHA TINCHER

## Call for Submissions

Manuscripts for the 2017 edition of SCC *Milestone* will be accepted through December 1, 2016. In the event that funding is not secured for publication, submissions will be held and considered for the next issue.

Each submission should include the author's name, address, and phone number on the first page. Essays, local history, poetry, and short stories—as well as black-and-white artwork—may be submitted. All submissions should be typed, and prose is limited to two thousand words.

Seven persons whose manuscripts or works of art are selected for publication also will receive cash rewards:

- First and second prize in poetry
- First and second prize in prose
- First and second prize in artwork
  - Cover

Students, faculty, staff, and alumni—along with residents of Macon, Swain, and Jackson counties and the Qualla Boundary—may submit to SCC *Milestone*.

Please send poetry and prose submissions to Toni Knott at [tknott@southwesterncc.edu](mailto:tknott@southwesterncc.edu) or call 828.339.4325 if you have questions.

Please send artwork submissions to Bob Keeling at [bkeeling@southwesterncc.edu](mailto:bkeeling@southwesterncc.edu) or call 828.339.4000 if you have questions.

For general information, contact Southwestern Community College's Public Information Office at 828.339.4394.





